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REPORT ON THE PROGRESS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY TO ESTABLISH THE REGIONAL AFRICAN SATELLITE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

1. At the twelfth session of the Conference of Ministers resolutions 278 (XII) and 281 (XII) were adopted requesting ECA, OAU and ITU to organize studies to establish the feasibility of a suitable regional satellite communications system(s) to complement the PANAFTEL network and to cater for broadcasting communications needs of the continent. The OAU Council of Ministers also subsequently adopted resolution CM/Res. 506 (XXVII) on the development of a regional satellite communications system.

2. Following on these resoltuions a regional seminar was organized on September 27 to October 1, 1976 jointly by ECA, OAU, UNESCO and ITU, in Addis Ababa on "Regional Co-operation for Education and Development in Africa, using Space Communication.". The ensuing recommendation from this Regional Seminar for full studies on the possible exploitation of space communications technology for education and development in the region was subsequently endorsed by the thirteenth session and fourth meeting of the Conference of Ministers in its resolution 310 (XIII). In this resolution, the Conference also called on ECA, OAU and ITU and UNESCO to mobilize resources for setting up, with minimum delay, a working group of experts to formulate a study of the possible Regional Satellite Communication System for Africa.

3. On the basis of a preliminary study conducted as part of the preparatory studies for the first phase programme of the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade for Africa (UNTACDA) a project entitled "The feasibility study on the African REgional Satellite System" (project No. SAP-01) was included in the UNTACDA phase I programme.

EVOLUTION

4. In April 1979, as part of the preparatory activities towards the formulation of the global strategy and plan of action for the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade, the Interagency Co-ordinating Committee for UNTACDA proposed the scope and terms of reference of the feasibility study on an African Satellite Communications System which had been called for in the previous ECA and OAU resolutions 310 (XIII) and CM. RES. 506 (XXVII) respectively. The proposals of the Interagency Co-ordinating Committee were subsequently endorsed by an inter-governmental meeting of experts in transport and communications in May 1979 and approved as a project by the Conference of Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning in May 1979. The project appears as project no. SAP-01 "Feasibility study on the African Regional Satellite Communications System" in ECA document E/CN.14/726 Add.1 entitled "United Nations Transport and Communications Decade for Africa, 1978-1988, Volume II approved programme of action for phase I, 1980-1983.

5. As a result of calls made by African leaders such as those cited above a number of UN and African intergovernmental organizations began undertaking and/or planning feasibility studies for the establishment of an African Regional Satellite Communications System.

6. By 1980 there were as many as four proposed feasibility studies on African regional satellite communication system each concerned with a possible telecommunication system (and here telecommunication means telephone/telex/telegraph and radio/television communication) that can complement the existing PAN-AFRICAN Telecommunication (PANAFTEL) and intra-African network and provide communication capabilities at least cost and with minimum delay for all communities including the rural areas.

The four studies were:

(a) Joint ECA/OAU/UNESCO/ITU prefeasibility study;

(b) ITU's prefeasibility study on satellite communications for rural telecommunication;

(c) PATU's prefeasibility study on an African regional satellite communication system; and

(d) UAPT's study on satellite communication system for Africa.

7. Concerned by the futile dispersal of scare resources associated with the proliferation of effort to realize an appropriate telecommunications network for the development of Africa and eager to see a firm direction of relevant activities, the third meeting of the African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning held in Cairo in March 1983, adopted resolution no. ECA/UNTACDA/Res.83/26 which, inter-alia, called for the harmonization and integration into a single project of all pre-feasibility study previously undertaken with the objective of establishing an appropriate telecommunication network for the development of Africa including the possibility of the provision of a regional satellite communication system. The project was to be entitled "Regional African Satellite Communication System" and now appears as project No. SAP-60-001 "Feasibility study on the Regional African Satellite Communications System" in ECA document E/ECA/TCD/17 entitled "United Nations Transport and Communications Decade for Africa, 1978-1988, Volume II programme of action for the communications sector of the second phase.

8. To pursue action towards the implementation of the system, the same resolution also established an Inter-agency Co-ordinating Committee (IACC) on communications composed of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Development Bank (ADB), the Pan-African Telecommunication Union (PATU), the Union of National Radio and Television Broadcasting Organisation of Africa (URTNA), the African Posts and Telecommunication Union (UAPT), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC) to continue its work and specifically to finalise the feasibility study document for the project as well as supervise and monitor the implementation of the study.

CURRENT STATUS OF RASCOM AND METHOD OF WORK

9. The sixth meeting of the Conference of African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning, held in Harare, Zimbabwe March 1986 reviewed the report of the Inter-Agency Co-ordinating Committee (IACC) and adopted resolution ECA/UNTACDA/Res.86/65 which mandated the IACC-RASCOM to proceed with its programme for immediate implementation of the feasibility study. In the event that the study is completed before 1988, and extra-ordinary conference of the African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning would be convened in Harare, Zimbabwe, to consider the IACC-RASCOM Report.

10. The feasibility study of the Regional African Satellite Communications System for the Development of Africa (RASCOM) will be undertaken based on a decision taken by African governments.

11. The Inter-Agency Co-ordinating Committee (IACC), now composed of the following organisations: Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), African Development Bank (ADB), Pan-African Telecommunications Union (PATU), Union des Radiodiffusions et Televisions Nationales d'Afrique (URTNA), Union Africaine des Postes et Telecommunications (UAPT), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and Commission africaine de l'Aviation Civile (AFCAC); is chaired by the OAU and its mandate, as defined by resolution ECA/UNTACDA/Res.83/26 charges it inter-alia, with the responsibility of finalizing the feasibility study document as well as supervise and monitor the implementation of the study..... The IACC shall assign to competent organization clear identifiable scope of work together with the necessary resources for its implementation.

Role of the Inter-Agency Co-ordinating Committee (IACC)

12. In order to accomplish the implementation of the feasibility study the IACC has established the following structure:

(a) Chairman and Vice-Chairman

The OAU is the Chairman of the IACC while the ECA acts its Vice-Chairman

(b) Lead Agency

13. To ensure the co-ordination of the execution of the project, ITU, in close co-operation with ECA and PATU and in close consultation with UAPT, as requested to assume the leading role.

(c) Technical Committee

14. The IACC in its 8th meeting (Addis Ababa, October 1984) decided to create a technical committee composed of PATU as chairman, ITU as co-ordinator and secretary and ECA, UAPT and URTNA as members which will report to the IACC. The technical committee will have the following duties.

- Elaboration of proposals for a work programme, planning and programming of various activities to be undertaken in the study.

- Drawing up of proposals for detailed work breakdown and determining the estimated cost of each work breakdown component.

- Formulating of proposals for the assignments of tasks to agencies.

- Monitoring, supervising and controlling the implementation of the feasibility study project as regards to both technical and financial aspects including the management of project funds.

15. Proposals emanating from the technical committee as well as reports on its activities would be submitted to the IACC for decision and policy guidelines.

16. The technical committee would have the following officers: Charman and Co-ordinator with the following responsibilities:

Chairman: Convenes the technical committee; chairs the technical committee, and presents the report of the technical committee to the IACC.

Co-ordinator: Draws up: the draft definition of tasks and breakdown of activities; the draft planning and programming of activities; the draft cost estimates of various activities; the draft documents pertaining to allocation of resources.

Ensures: the follow-up and implementation of the directives of IACC; the supervision and control of activities; the analysis and integration of the various parts of the study.

Submits: for the consideration of the technical committee separate reports, on tasks assigned to him (executing agencies). The technical committee will consider the report submitted to it by the co-ordinator and transmit it with its comments to the IACC for decision.

17. The description of the role of the co-ordinator was considered as incomplete and additional duties might be added when the question of disbursement of funds are settled.

(d) Financial Sub-committee

18. A financial sub-committee was established as a result of a decision taken by the 5th IACC meeting. The financial sub-committee is composed of ECA, ADB, PATU, UAPT, URTNA and ITU, the ADB being the financial advisor of the IACC.

19. The full IACC should meet on a 6 monthly basis. It should also hold consultative meetings with the representatives of the financing governments and institutions participating in the project as and when required.

20. The terms of reference, which identify and define appropriate terrestrial and space-born integrated telecommunication systems for the provision of services to all sectors of the society with particular emphasis to the great majority of rural inhabitants, has been approved by African governments.

21. Since the Regional African Satellite Communication System for the Development of Africa is a project conceived by the governments of Africa, it will be executed by them at national and regional levels using their own manpower and resources as much as possible.

22. The supreme authority for the RASCOM is the Conference of Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning assisted by an Interim Executive Committee (IEC), which is charged with the technical responsibility of following up the implementation of the project. The Interim Executive Committee will consist of one representative from each African country participating in the project. The members of the IEC have, as a group, to orient the activities of the project, to study the various reports, especially from the financial, technical and economic points of view and submit recommendations to the Conference of Ministers.

23. The IACC will submit reports and recommendations to the Conference of Ministers via the Interim Executive Committee

24. The Project Office is now in the process of being established to undertake parts of the study and to ensure its day-to-day follow-up. This Office will be manned by a team of internationally recruited experts for a fixed term and located at the ITU Headquarters. The experts engaged for the implementation of the project will be recruited by the IACC, and will carry out their duties under the supervision of the Secretary General of the ITU (Co-ordinator). The ITU will provide to project staff support facilities as well as resources such as computer facilities from its headquarters. In addition, the experts will work under the umbrella of privileges and immunities that are accorded to staff in the United Nations System for technical co-operation.

26. The Project Office will assume responsibility for establishing the norms for field work and guide and supervise the work of national and international experts involved in the study. It will, further, compile and analyse reports from the field.

The Role of supervising institutions

26. The project office will be assisted by the regional supervising agencies. The supervising institutions are those agencies which are directly associated with the practical execution of the project, i.e., ITU, ECA, PATU, UAPT and URTNA These agencies will be called to play an active role in the execution of the poject and their staff members will assist the national project co-ordinators and other national experts in the carrying out of field activities in particular as far as national level activities are concerned. The staff members of these agencies, in addition, will assume the responsibility of field supervision so as to ensure the compatibility of work being carried out in different countries in accordance with previously agreed norms. To this end, the IACC will allocate funds from the project budget to the associated agencies for a specifically agreed list of activities in the

form of a sub-contract. The amount to be allocated shall be calculated on the extent and duration of the activity. The supervising agencies would disburse the earmarked funds according to the requirements of that portion of the project for which they are responsible and will be fully accountable.

27. With regard to funding of the feasibility study, the project cost had been eastimated at $US 6 million. Out of the total estimated cost of the project $600,000 or 10 per cent are now firmly pledged from resources of UNDP and ITU. As for the remaining 90 per cent or $US 5.4 million, offers have been received from Zimbabwe and Ethiopia through the African Development Bank (ADB). Additional offers have also been received from UNDP, UNESCO and Governments of Italy and the Federal Republic of Germany. The offers from Zimbabwe and Ethiopia are still subject to approval by the ADB. The two offers from Italy and FRG still required further negotiations.